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ABSTRACT

Factors influencing the educational experiences of immigrants to the United States are outlined and discussed. The factors are categorized as relevant to the individual (personal strengths, age at arrival, quantity and quality of educational background, native language English proficiency, reasons for immigrating, race/ethnicity, immigration status, relationships with family members, gender, physical health, mental health), to family (skills and strengths, educational background, English proficiency, mobility/transience, immigration status, economic resources), to the relationship of the native culture and country to the U.S. (degree of similarity in cultures, history of relations between countries, proximity of home country), to immigrant experience (linguistic displacement, cultural displacement), and to the context encountered within the U.S. (language attitudes, presence of others speaking the native language, status of the native country within the U.S., presence of other nationals, racial/ethnic attitudes, economic resources, presence of support services). The importance of interrelationships between these factors is also emphasized. Contains 26 references. (MSE)

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INFLUENCES ON THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN U.S. SCHOOLS

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Influences on the Educational Experiences of Immigrant Students in U.S. Schools

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Although immigrant students are commonly perceived first-and-foremost as learners of English, a host of other interrelated factors play a part in the educational paths immigrant students take, their progress on those paths, and the outcome of the journey. Knowledge of these influences forms the foundation upon which to build approaches that will assist immigrant students as whole people making their way into, through, and beyond school in the United States. Without this knowledge, we are certain to ignore or minimize many of these critical influences. Some of them characterize individual students and their families, some characterize the relationship between their native country and culture and the U.S., others characterize the immigrant experience, and still others the particular context within the U.S. into which students immigrate and where they attend school (see Figure 1). Although I have separated these factors for purposes of analysis, many of them are inextricably linked in real life (e.g., the economic resources of a family and the economic resources of a community; the educational backgrounds of individual students and educational backgrounds of their family members; the age of arrival in the U.S., English proficiency, and educational background). These factors can have a critical impact on the adjustment of immigrant youths to U.S. schooling and culture and on their success through the transitions of adolescence and into adulthood. Some of them can have either positive or negative impacts depending upon a variety of other, interrelated factors.

FIGURE 1: INFLUENCES ON THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

Factors Relevant to:				
The Individual	**Family**	**Relationship of Native Culture & Country to U.S.**	**Immigrant Experience**	**Context within the U.S.**
•Personal strengths	•Skills and strengths			
•Age of arrival				
•Educational background – amount – quality	•Educational backgrounds			
•Native language			•Linguistic displacement	•Attitudes toward non-English languages •Attitudes toward the student's language
•Proficiency in English	•Proficiency in English			•Presence of others who speak student's language
•Reasons for immigrating		•Degree of similarity between home culture and U.S. culture •History of relations between home country and U.S. •Proximity of home country to the U.S.	•Cultural displacement	•Status of native country within the U.S. •Presence of others from student's native country
	•Mobility/transience			
•Race/ethnicity				•Attitudes toward people of student's race/ethnicity •Presence of others of the same race/ethnicity
•Immigration status	•Immigration status			•Attitudes toward immigrants
•Relationships with family members				
•Gender				
	•Economic resources			•Economic resources available
•Physical health •Mental health				•Presence of support services

We tend to ignore these critical influences even though they have a major impact on the educational experiences of immigrant students. By briefly describing them below, I hope to make them explicit and therefore bring them to the awareness of educators of immigrant students.

Individual Factors

Personal strengths and resilience. The emphasis on the obstacles encountered by immigrants generally leads to the perception that their lives are fraught only with problems. We should not assume, however, that all immigrant students bring only deficiencies and problems with them. Some come from economically comfortable families and have completed rigorous educational programs. Even those who have lived through trauma and hardship may have developed personal strengths and maturity that will see them through the adjustment to a new culture quite successfully. While immigrants do face many challenges, many of them meet the challenges and ultimately overcome them through their own strengths, optimism, and resources.

Age of arrival in the United States. In general, the younger one is, the easier it is to adjust to change. As we grow older, we develop attachments to people, places, and habits which we miss if we no longer have access to them. Older immigrants face a greater challenge in leaving behind more deeply internalized systems and expectations. The younger people are when they immigrate, generally the more easily they can adapt to a new culture and decipher the expectations of their new school system. Youths who immigrate as teenagers, especially if they are not fluent in English, are less likely to follow traditional paths beyond high school than those who have more time to adjust to U.S. culture and to learn English before making the transition to adult life.

Educational background and quality of education. The strength of an immigrant's educational background plays a crucial role in her success in the U.S.

"Students who have attended school full time in their native countries are often ahead of American students, especially in mathematics and science. However, students whose schooling was delayed or disrupted due to poverty and war are often far behind" (McDonnell & Hill, 1993, p. 70). Challenging, responsive, and supportive educational experiences can help students catch up. Unfortunately, most immigrant students attend urban schools which "lack the human and fiscal resources to educate students well, whether they are immigrant or native-born" (McDonnell & Hill, 1993, p. xii). There are not enough personnel, materials, supplies, or school buildings to provide quality education for any students. The lack of resources also limits the time and energy available in most poor urban schools to reform practice so that it reflects current approaches to student-centered, active learning.

Overall indications are that the quality of education provided specifically for immigrant students also falls short of what is needed, as it is characterized by a "shortage of teachers qualified to teach LEP students" (McDonnell & Hill, 1993, p. 27, see also p. 89), a shortage of educators who speak and can teach in languages other than English (p. 52), a shortage of instructional and assessment materials appropriate for immigrant students, ineffective strategies for reaching immigrant students' parents (p. 76), limited access to curriculum at the secondary level (Minicucci & Olsen, 1991), and inadequate support services. This is not to say that all immigrant students suffer from these general shortcomings in the system. Those lucky enough to be enrolled in schools with strong educational programs and qualified, experienced staff have access to educational foundations that support their learning and their successful movement through the educational system. (Examples of such schools and programs appear throughout this series. See also, Chang, 1990; Friedlander, 1991; Kauffman, et al., 1994; Lucas, 1993; Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990; National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1994; Olsen, 1989.)

Native language. The specific native language that an immigrant speaks can influence his learning of English and his acceptance into U.S. culture for at least two reasons: (1) people with "accents" of higher status languages (e.g., French) are less harshly judged than people with accents of lower status languages (e.g., Spanish), and (2) speakers of languages which have not had their own alphabets until recently (e.g., Hmong) have a "dual handicap" of not knowing English and not being literate (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988, p. 17). Thus, speakers of some languages face greater obstacles in adjusting to and succeeding in U.S. schools and U.S. culture than others.

Proficiency in English. The one factor that is universally recognized as central to the success of immigrant students is their degree of proficiency in English (see McDonnell & Hill, 1993). Since English is the language of the United States, immigrants must become proficient in order to fully participate in U.S. commerce, government, and education. Age of arrival, educational background, and attainment of English proficiency are inextricably interrelated in ways that are especially relevant to secondary-age immigrants: "Few teenage immigrants who enter U.S. schools with deficient academic preparation ever make the transition to full-time English language instruction, and many leave school without diplomas and several years below normal grade levels" (McDonnell & Hill, 1993, p. 70). Secondary-school-age immigrants face a more difficult task in learning a second language than their younger peers. They are expected to read dense textbooks and to learn complex subject matter requiring a more sophisticated grasp of language and concepts than elementary students. Because of the general lack of native language instruction at the secondary level, those who are not proficient in English usually find themselves in watered-down, remedial courses even when their grasp of content in their native language is advanced. This practice, of course, impedes their educational progress and does not allow them to prepare adequately for university enrollment.

Reasons for immigrating. Immigrants come to the U.S. for one of two reasons: seeking better economic and educational opportunities for themselves and their families (the "pull" factors of the U.S.), or fleeing, political turmoil, war and extreme economic hardship in their own countries (the "push" factors within their native countries) (Olsen, 1988, p. 18). Those in the first group, who come to the U.S. voluntarily, tend to "interpret the economic, political and social barriers against them as more or less temporary problems, as problems they will or can overcome with the passage of time, hard work, or more education" (Ogbu, 1991, p.11). They made their own decision to come to the U.S. (though individual immigrants, especially children and youths, typically have little say in the matter) and they know they can return home. Refugees, on the other hand, did not necessarily want to leave their homes, often had little time to prepare, could not bring money and possessions with them, and cannot return home no matter how much hardship they face in the U.S., or can return only at great risk and with great difficulty and hardship. These can be crucial differences in the process of adjustment.

Race/ethnicity. Race and ethnicity have a profound impact on the lives of people in the United States. Typically, non-Europeans face discrimination in this country, different groups bearing the brunt of racism in different ways. Immigrants of African Heritage (including Haitians) suffer the double prejudice that results from their dual status as immigrants and as people with darker skin. The stereotype of Asians as the "model minority" carries its own burdens in the assumptions that all Asians are alike (even groups as different as Hmong and Koreans) and that they need no support to achieve in U.S. schools and society. Anti-immigrant feelings and actions are targeted primarily at those who are not of European background, thus confounding the prejudice based on race and on immigration status. While there is some evidence that immigrants respond in more beneficial ways to such prejudice than do U.S.-born minorities (see

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Gibson & Ogbu, 1991), these experiences increase the difficulty of the challenges that immigrants face in their adjustment to their new lives in the U.S.

Immigration status. It is estimated that between 200,000 and 300,000 undocumented immigrants enter and remain in the U.S. each year (Fix & Passel, 1994, p.4). In *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982), the Supreme Court ruled that undocumented children cannot be denied access to education solely on the basis of their immigration status unless a "compelling" government interest is served (see National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988, pp. 155ff for a discussion of *Plyler v. Doe* and other legal issues in the education of immigrants). That legal detail does not diminish the impact of fear and prejudice on children, however.

Prejudice against immigrants in general has increased in recent years and undocumented immigrants are special targets. States like California and Florida, which have large numbers of immigrants, have tended to blame illegal immigrants for their economic problems. The passage of Proposition 187 in California in 1994, which if enacted would deny education, health care, and other services to undocumented immigrants, has increased fears of deportation, and there are indications that some children have stopped attending school. While Proposition 187 has been declared unconstitutional, the worries of undocumented immigrants and their children will no doubt continue to have an impact on children's participation in and engagement with education.

Intergenerational relationships. During the adjustment to a new country and culture, youths and their parents especially need each other's support. Many families provide the love and assurance that is needed to help young people develop a sense of security and confidence, even when they do not understand the people around them and they are misunderstood in return. However, the nature of the immigrant experience itself can promote increased distance between children and their parents. In

many immigrant families, the responses of older and younger immigrants to the differences between native cultures and U.S. culture lead to intergenerational conflict.

> There is an increasing sense of separation between the parents and the children. [W]here the parents are still having some trouble adjusting to the culture, to the language, the students themselves are moving forward which sometimes includes losing their sense of their roots. There's a clash in terms of the language, the values, the backgrounds. (Carlos Cordova, quoted in Olsen, 1988, p. 31)

The life story told by one Mien mother who immigrated from Laos illustrates this painful gap. The following is an excerpt:

> We moved to the United States in March 1980 to start a better life. But now my son doesn't want to go to school. He finished high school and the probation officer encouraged him to go to college. But he won't go to college and he won't get a job. He only stays home.... Since my son Kao Cho dropped out of school, he has been in jail three times.... He went out with his friends, sometimes for two or three weeks, and I didn't know where he was.... While he was gone with his friends, I couldn't stay home. I went around to all the neighbors looking for him day and night. But I couldn't find him anywhere. When I came home, I couldn't sleep. I sat in the living room watching the door waiting for him to come home.
>
> A few weeks later when Kao Cho came home, I asked him, "Why were you gone so long? I stayed home worrying about you." He said, "Why did you worry about me? I go off by myself and you stay by yourself. I am a bad boy and you shouldn't worry about me."
>
> ....So now the hopes and dreams I had for my children when we came to this country have died.... I am very hurt by what Kao Cho has done and I am angry. I don't know what to do about him. He hasn't been in any more trouble, but he still hasn't gotten a job or gone back to school. I try to talk to him, but he won't listen. I don't know what to do about my son. (Saechao, 1993)

Gender. One individual characteristic that can lead to intergenerational conflict is gender. The expectations of males and females vary radically from culture to culture, with few cultures offering as much equality and freedom to females and as much flexibility in roles to males as the U.S. The different assumptions about appropriate and desirable aspirations for males and females can cause tensions among adolescent immigrants and between them and the more traditional adults in their families.

Physical and mental health. Immigrants who are poor and have experienced war and violence in their native country or in their journey to the U.S. may suffer from health problems that interfere with their educational and personal adjustment and progress. In addition to suffering from physical ailments, immigrants, and especially refugees who have experienced a great deal of trauma and loss, may also be affected by emotional problems. Traditional Western approaches to addressing these problems may not be appropriate or effective, so the assistance of counselors and service providers who are from or are knowledgeable about students' cultures are needed (see Cohon, 1983; Esquivel & Keitel, 1990; Figueroa, Sandoval, & Merino, 1984; Ramirez, 1989; Sue, D.W., 1981; Sue, S., & Chin, 1983). Even if immigrants do consider Western medicine desirable, they may not have access to "the very expensive American health care system" (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1988, p. 29) and may thus suffer from illness for that reason.

Family Factors

Skills and strengths. The extent to which a student's family members have personal skills and strengths can have a profound effect on the student. Can the adults in the family negotiate within their new context successfully? Can they adapt skills and knowledge from their previous experiences to their new life? Can they provide care and a sense of security for their children? Can they overcome obstacles in productive ways?

These factors help to determine adolescents' adjustment to their new lives and school contexts.

Many immigrant families do have such skills and strengths. Contrary to stereotypes of immigrants as drains on the economic and social service systems: they "have virtually the same average [household] income as" natives (Fix & Passel, 1994, p.36); they "contribute substantially to the U.S. economy," creating "more jobs than they themselves fill" (p. 47); they "generate significantly more in taxes paid than they cost in services received" (p.57); excluding refugees, "immigrants of working age are considerably less likely than natives" to receive welfare (p. 57); while they "are more likely than natives to have very low educational attainment..., they are also more likely than natives to have advanced degrees" (p.32-33). Immigrant students would benefit both from support aimed at helping their families overcome obstacles and from strategies to acknowledge and tap their families' strengths.

Educational backgrounds. Just as the previous educational backgrounds of adolescents influence their academic success in the U.S., so too do the educational backgrounds of their families, especially their parents or primary caretakers. Parents who have strong literacy skills and are familiar with formal educational systems are more able to help their children adjust to the system in the U.S. and to provide a context which supports their children's success in school. This distinction is meaningful even for U.S.-born families; those with stronger educational backgrounds are better equipped to support their children's formal education.

Proficiency in English. When family members are fluent in English, everything is easier for adolescents in the family. Family members can more easily assist adolescents in their process of adjusting to a new culture and language. They can explain unfamiliar and incomprehensible language and behavior and help youths make human contacts which they need to become integrated into their new contexts, including their schools. When parents speak little or no English, the children often become the

mediators between their parents and the English-speaking world. This can lead to role-reversals which strain family relationships and diminish much-needed mutual support.

Mobility. "Immigrant children enter and leave school at times not normally contemplated by the school schedule, and they change schools frequently" (McDonnell & Hill, 1993, p. 75). This transience of immigrant families poses a challenge for the school system, which is designed for students who are stable for at least nine months of the year. The mobility may result from regular migratory patterns related to agricultural work or from other factors, such as the need for parents to get work in other places, opportunities for better housing, and the desire to visit or permanently join family members in other places. While there have been attempts to coordinate record keeping for children officially designated as part of migrant families, the funding for this effort is being cut by the federal government. The great majority of mobile immigrant children simply lose out on months and even years of education.

Immigration status. The immigration status of a student's family can have a major impact on the student. Even when they themselves are legal residents or citizens, children of those with no official immigrant status bear the extra burden of fear that they and their families will be deported, which can mean returning to severe poverty or political persecution, violence, or even death, depending upon their reasons for leaving their country of origin. Such children are unlikely to participate in any school activities or to seek recognition or attention for fear that the undocumented status of their families will be discovered.

Economic resources. The only "capital" most recent immigrants bring with them is "their courage and willingness to work" (McDonnell & Hill, 1993, p. 50). Most have come seeking economic opportunities which they did not have in their native countries. Their poverty adds to the challenges they face as immigrants and refugees. Most high school-age immigrant students need to hold jobs, many have other adult responsibilities, many have little access to quality health care, information, or means of

support, and many live in crowded, poorly maintained apartments. They attend the poorest urban schools which cannot provide standard educational resources, much less supplemental resources for immigrants. On the other hand, some immigrants are more affluent and they, of course, move into more affluent areas, where schools have more resources and tend to be safer as well, thus allowing more concentration on education *per se* and less energy diverted to safety and prevention of violence.

Factors related to the relationship of the native culture and country to the U.S.

Several aspects of an immigrant's native country influence his adjustment to and success in the U.S. These include the following:

The degree of similarity between the native culture and the U.S., particularly expectations and assumptions about education. For example, someone from Highland Laos has considerably less in common with people in the U.S. and is less likely to be familiar with formal education than someone from Japan. And while Japanese culture shares much with the U.S. today, many common ways of thinking and behaving in Japan are less similar to those in the U.S. than are those of, say, Sweden. The less the similarity, the more an immigrant must learn and the more adapting he must do.

The history of relations between the U.S. and the country of origin. Immigrants from some countries are more welcome in the U.S. than those from others because the history of relations has led to certain attitudes and expectations on the part of U.S. residents. The Philippines, for example, has a long history of close relations with the U.S., while Vietnam was considered an enemy of the U.S. for several decades. Cuban immigrants have been welcomed as friends of democracy, while those from El Salvador have been suspected of Communist leanings.

The proximity of the country to the U.S. Immigrants from countries near the United States can easily return home temporarily or permanently. This allows

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them to visit relatives still at home and gives them the option of returning if life in the U.S. is too difficult. It also means that children may be taken out of school at certain times of the year to return home for extended vacations, thus missing out on some of their schooling. Immigrants who have come from far away do not have the same opportunities as those from nearby countries, especially if they have limited economic resources.

Factors related to the Immigrant Experience

Linguistic displacement and adjustment. Language shock, like culture shock, takes a toll on all who spend time in an environment where they cannot make full use of their own languages. As an integral part of identity and the major vehicle for expressing identity, language is precious to us. When young people cannot express themselves in their native language, they may lose a sense of themselves for some time while they adjust to their new linguistic reality and develop a new identity within it. The silent period that many immigrant students go through when they first enter U.S. schools may indicate a period of linguistic adjustment as well as give them a chance to develop linguistic abilities.

Cultural displacement and adjustment. Immigration is a transitional experience that poses difficulties. Whether immigrants are documented or undocumented, whether they have chosen to immigrate to the U.S. or have been forced to do so by circumstances in their native countries, whether or not they have left family members behind, their lives are disrupted. They experience culture shock as they leave behind the more familiar for the less familiar and begin to develop new identities that integrate their previous lives with their new ones. The degree of displacement is influenced by a number of factors, including differences and similarities between the native culture and U.S. culture, the nature of the relationships immigrants have with

U.S. residents, and whether immigrants have contact with others from their home countries.

Most adolescents have little if any voice in deciding whether to immigrate. They must leave friends, relatives, familiar places and routines for the uncertainty of a new life. This transition influences the emotional state of adolescents, which in turn can interfere with their concentration and learning at school. In this context, adolescent immigrants face a serious challenge in adjusting to U.S. secondary school, where the focus is on "learning the content itself" rather than on "creating connections between students and teachers to nurture learning" (Wheelock, 1993, p. 16) and where there is increasing violence and decreasing safety for all students.

Factors related to the context in which immigrants live within the U.S.

Attitudes toward non-English languages in general and toward the student's native language in particular. Attitudes toward immigrant languages within the context in which immigrant students live can also influence their educational success. While the general attitude in the United States can be characterized as prejudicial toward languages other than English and toward non-European cultures, particular contexts are more or less welcoming to immigrant languages and cultures. In some areas, immigrants can function in their native language while they are learning English, and in others they are harassed for speaking their native language. These attitudes not only influence the nature of interactions immigrants have with others but also the types of educational programs available and the amount of support in the larger community for the education of immigrant students.

Status of the student's native country. Just as different languages are given different degrees of status in the eyes of U.S. natives, so too are different countries. An immigrant from Spain is likely to be treated differently than an immigrant from Mexico, for example. Students may experience more or less

discrimination and may feel more or less welcome depending upon the status of their native countries in the eyes of those in the context in which they live. A number of factors determine the status of a particular country in the U.S., including the history of relations between the U.S. and the native country, the history of relations between previous immigrants from the country and people in the U.S. context, the race/ethnicity of natives of the country, and the economic situation of the country.

Attitudes toward people of the student's race/ethnicity. As described above, immigrants of non-European races and ethnic backgrounds often suffer from prejudice and discrimination in the U.S. Where they live determines to some extent the degree to which they suffer from these societal ills. Some areas are more welcoming of differences than others; some areas are more welcoming of some groups and less welcoming of other groups. In some areas, there are conflicts between various ethnic minority groups. The tensions between African Americans and Koreans in South Central Los Angeles surfaced after the verdict in the Rodney King case in 1992, for example.

Attitudes toward immigrants. As mentioned above, prejudice against immigrants in general has increased in recent years, as indicated by the passage in 1994 of California's Proposition 187. Despite research to the contrary (e.g., Fix & Passel, 1994), many people continue to believe that immigrants take jobs away from U.S.-born workers, receive a disproportionate share of social services and assistance, and come to the U.S. in order to benefit from a generous welfare system (see *Myths and facts: The economic impact of immigration in the United States*, 1993). Prejudice against immigrants is more pronounced in some areas than in others, so immigrants face greater obstacles to smooth adjustment and to success in the U.S. if they live in those areas.

Presence of other immigrants who speak the same native language, come from the same culture, and share the same racial/ethnic heritage. Many immigrants move to areas where they know there are people who speak their

languages and share their cultures. Most major cities have linguistic minority communities where immigrants can get along without speaking English fluently and without giving up their cultures entirely. Some less urban areas also support relatively large immigrant groups. A Lao community lives in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, for example, and Stockton, CA is home to many Southeast Asians. Immigrants may benefit from added support, familiarity, and ease of communication when they live in communities with their compatriots. Language shock and culture shock can be diminished by regular contact with people who share ways of talking, thinking, and behaving. Recent immigrants can learn from previous immigrants what to expect and how to survive and thrive in their new setting – including in the educational setting.

On the other hand, integration into the larger U.S. culture and therefore access to resources and to the culture of power (Delpit, 1988) may be decreased when communities are populated by predominantly immigrant groups. There are many homogeneous immigrant and minority communities in this country, many of which are poor. While integration is no longer considered a desired goal by everyone, the fact remains that most communities that are populated primarily by people of color have fewer economic resources than communities with larger numbers of white residents.

Whether or not immigrants live in an area with others of their racial/ethnic background has an impact on their lives as well. The shared experience of being perceived and responded to in particular ways because of these characteristics contributes to a sense of community, shared reality, and personal identity. When immigrants suffer from discrimination, they can find support from others who understand the experience. On the other hand, being the only person or family of a certain racial/ethnic group in a community can decrease the likelihood that other residents will develop stereotypes of the entire group which they then apply to individuals. It can also reduce the potential for fear and territoriality that is often the response of long-time residents to larger numbers of people of color.

Many immigrants live in areas where there are few immigrants overall or few immigrants who share their ethnic and linguistic background, and where they are the only speakers of their native language. Their feelings of displacement and isolation may be strong. This lack of an immigrant community may have a negative impact on a family and on individuals, depending to some extent upon the attitudes of others toward them and the relationships they develop.

Economic resources available. Poorer communities, by definition, have few economic resources to support their residents. Access to quality health care, transportation, libraries, recreational facilities, and educational programs and facilities vary radically in the U.S. (see Kozol, 1991). Many immigrants, especially more recent arrivals, live in communities with few economic resources. In a study of immigrant students in New Jersey schools, Villegas (1992a) found that the less affluent districts enrolled larger numbers of immigrant students overall and particularly students from Central and South America and the Caribbean, while the more affluent districts enrolled larger proportions of Asian students. The former reported "substantially more pronounced" problems in serving immigrant students (p. 4).

Presence of support services in the community. A characteristic of the context in which immigrants live that influences their lives and success and that is closely related to their physical and mental health needs is the presence of support services. Community-based organizations (CBOs), federal and state social services, local and religious charities, and ethnic and national groups provide various types of assistance to immigrants as they make the transition into their new culture. They help people find places to live, jobs, and financial assistance. They provide access to health care, information, and translation services. They allow immigrants to maintain customs and rituals from their native cultures. When available, such support services can prevent feelings of loneliness and make the transition process more successful.

Conclusion

While all immigrants experience some linguistic and cultural displacement, the degree to which these difficulties and others affect individual immigrants varies depending upon how all of the influences discussed above come together. The experience can be so painful and difficult that a person never overcomes it, or it can be relatively easy. The quality of an individual's life may be irreparably damaged by the experience or greatly improved. To a great extent, the impact of immigration on immigrant students' educational experiences depends upon how individuals interact with the external influences they encounter.

The litany of influences above belies the fact that each of us has a part in making of our lives what we do – a fact that is reflected in the variety of responses to the external and internal influences on immigrants' lives and experiences. While some factors (e.g., poverty) are more difficult to work around than others (e.g., lack of proficiency in English), some individuals do manage to succeed despite great obstacles. Some individuals construct their realities and thus their lives in such a way that they fashion strengths out of experiences that prove overwhelming to others. We do not understand the roots or processes of such resilience well enough.

Indeed, we tend to see the obstacles as so powerful that we can't believe people are up to overcoming them, so we in turn perceive those who must face them as defeated before they begin. This perception leads us to dwell on deficiencies in immigrant students rather than to assume that they have the resources to succeed despite the great challenges they face. We must give more attention to those resources and learn ways to support individuals' strengths. We must learn to see these mostly negative influences as only one part of the equation, to be reckoned with but not to be surrendered to.

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